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The Resurgence of Nationalist-Populist Movements in
Central and Eastern European States and the European Union

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Abstract

This paper examines the causes of the resurgence of populism and nationalism in status quo Central and Eastern Europe. It analyzes the case studies of Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic in order to test the two explanations of this resurgence. The proposed explanations include effects of transition as the causes of the observed phenomenon, while the second one emphasizes the process of EU accession as the primary cause. The findings support that the loss of social welfare benefits during transition contribute to the success of populist parties. In addition, the unique political situation of CEECs that had allowed populist parties to gain opposition spots through which it was convenient to promote an anti-establishment agenda. The accession to the EU in 2004 did not directly contribute to a negative perception of democracy or support for populist parties, however, democratic deficit of the EU and lack of coherent and sensible policy allowed the populist parties to use the EU as “the elite” against which they could mobilize support. I conclude that support of populist and nationalist parties heavily depends on post-truth and construction of economic issues, which is the same political strategy used by parties and politicians both in CEECs and other European states.

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Introduction

The accession of Eastern bloc countries to the European Union is deemed as a prominent event of post-Cold War history. The former Soviet states of Central and Eastern Europe have joined the supranational body through a lengthy process of accession that started in 1989. For the CEECs (Central and Eastern European countries) this event was an important historic mark of their transition from the communist system to democratic rule, as well as their reunion with the family of European nations. Although the historical and political significance of the enlargement was evident, opposition from member states and lack of accession mechanisms in the design of the European Union lengthened the already complicated accession process. The Czech President at the time, Vaclav Havel, warned that delaying welcoming the CEECs to the union posed many dangers including “the growth of various nationalist and populist movements” and even an emergence of a “new iron curtain” between the East and West of Europe.¹ Despite of the difficulties, eight former communist states joined the supranational body on May 1st, 2004, and due to the high level of support for European integration the accession was celebrated across Central and Eastern Europe. Later a 2008 World Bank report had even stated that the Visegrád Four (including Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) were able to create “stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities”, as well as “functioning market economies”.² The post-accession period, though received differing analyses, was in general regarded as the movement of CEECs towards

¹ Vaclav Havel as quoted in The Irish Times. “Havel Warns on Delay of Enlargement.” *The Irish Times*, The Irish Times, 15 Oct. 2002.

² World Bank “Unleashing Prosperity” report as quoted in Dean, Alex. “The New Nationalism: Eastern Europe Turns Right.” *Prospect Magazine The New Nationalism Eastern Europe Turns Right Comments*, Mar. 2016.

Europeanism and integration with the former Soviet states achieving their dream of becoming fully integrated members of the political and economic union.

The rise of nationalist, populist, and Eurosceptic parties and politicians in the countries of the Eastern bloc in light of recent integration has therefore attracted attention of the international community. Before the EU accession, nationalism in the Visegrád 4 was mostly attributed to defensive nationalism;³ however, after the EU accession these states were deemed to be on the path of embracing a shared Central European identity before they have backslided to aggressive nationalism.⁴ The rise of nationalism and populism, which became prominent especially after the Eurozone Crisis, could be traced through specific patterns of criticizing EU immigration policy, backsliding in the area of democratic norms, and emphasizing state sovereignty. Eurosceptic rhetoric of politicians such as Viktor Orbán and Andrej Babiš has gained mass support while simultaneously it is widely acknowledged that the EU membership brings great economic and security benefits to the CEECs. Some may contend that the trend observed in the Visegrad 4 is a part of the overall rise of populism and Euroscepticism, while others state that specific economic, political and historical factors unique to post-Soviet states explain this resurgence. The resurgence of nationalism and populism in Central and Eastern Europe is currently causing discord on the actions of the supranational body and therefore has the potential to seriously undermine the union's capacity for joint decision-making. In addition, such rhetoric has the

³ As suggested by Ewa M. Thompson, nationalism could be distinguished between defensive and aggressive, with defensive nationalism present in small and middle-sized nations promoting national rhetoric for survival purposes rather than aggression in light of natural disasters or threat of expansionist neighbours, while the latter is centered around aggression and not survival. Korablyova notes that defensive nationalism can easily transform into the aggressive one and it could be difficult to distinguish the two. See Ewa M. Thompson as cited in Korablyova, Valeria. "The Ambiguity of Nationalism in East Central Europe." *Prague Civil Society Centre*, 21 June 2017.

⁴ Korablyova, Valeria. "The Ambiguity of Nationalism in East Central Europe." *Prague Civil Society Centre*, 21 June 2017.

potential to undermine liberal democratic values, weakening the European Union as an actor in the international arena. The legacy of accession and democratic transition of CEECs as their celebrated and long aspired historic return to the European family may suffer from the posed threat to Europeanism and could even affect the membership of the countries in the supranational union. It is therefore essential to study why the Visegrád countries have turned to nationalism and populism, especially after years of political and economic integration, in order to prepare for the future challenges posed to EU members' cooperation, future EU enlargement, spread of liberal democratic values, and the power of international organizations.

The aim of this research paper is to examine various reasons that have contributed to the resurgence of nationalism and rise in populism and Euroscepticism in Visegrád countries through a study of the cases of Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic. The three presented cases joined the EU as a part of the Eastern bloc expansion in 2004. I will provide a comparative analysis of how Visegrád countries are influenced by the economic and political context of the EU, as well as the role of the EU context and policy in explaining the popularity of nationalist and populist ideas in the three respective cases. Studying the shared Soviet past, democratic transition, as well as the process of EU accession can illuminate how nationalist and populist movements have been able to politically mobilize in these countries while using criticism of the EU despite of the relatively recent accession and evident benefits of membership. The research paper aims to answer the following questions: What are the factors that explain the evident flourishing of nationalist movements, populism and Euroscepticism in the status quo in CEECs? Why did nationalist, populist, and Eurosceptic politicians and movements gain popularity in the Eastern bloc, which has benefitted from European economic and political integration and has aspired

historically to be a part of the shared European project? What is the role that the EU had played to contribute to this development? The thesis will be structured as follows: Section 1 is dedicated to definitions of key terms and theoretical foundation. Section 2 provides an empirical background of the three selected case studies of Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic. Section 3 presents two hypotheses that attempt to explain the research puzzle. Section 4 provides evidence based on the three case studies. Section 5 analyzes the results in light of competing explanations, and tries to explain whether Eastern and Central European populism is unique compared to other movements in the European political context. Section 6, the conclusion, presents findings of the research as well as its limitations, and the contributions the findings make to the field and future predictions.

Theory

It is necessary to provide the definitions of nationalism and populism and establish a theoretical background for the purpose of this research paper. It should be acknowledged that with both of the terms there is a lack of a uniform definition, and therefore the context of the use of terms is important. For example, the definitions of “populism” range between ideology, strategy, or political style in academic works.⁵ The definitions of nationalism alone can be classified under primordialist and sociobiological, instrumentalist, modernization and evolutionary theoretical definitions.⁶ Though this paper will explain the differences in theory, that would arise for example between the Ernest Gellner's definition of a nation and the one by Benedict Anderson, they are of more importance to theoretical debates of the origin of

⁵ Page 146: Kessel, Stijn Van. “Like a Hurricane? The Winds of Populism in Contemporary Europe.” *Etablierungschancen Neuer Parteien*, 2016, pp. 145–162.

⁶ Classification by theory/school is based on Josep R. Llobera. “Recent Theories of Nationalism.” *Cite Seer X at Penn State*, The Institut De Ciències Polítiques i Socials (ICPS), 1999.

nationalism and what factors are most important when trying to understand what constitutes a nation, whereas this research is more focused on examining the specific way that political parties use nationalism and populism in their discourse. Thus, the context in which nationalism and populism are studied is under priority consideration. While there might be a certain consensus on common factors that are intrinsic to populism, populism manifests itself in a distinct fashion in Latin American politics than it does in European politics. The difficulty of establishing a uniform definition, which arises from the rich theoretical heritage on nationalism and populism, should be properly acknowledged and although an overview of literature on the two is important, I will explain in what capacity the terms are used in this research, from what theoretical traditions the definitions arise, and how the definitions will be limited in order to pertain to the broader argument of this research. The definitions are limited to most prominent theoretical schools, and later to the specifics of the nationalism and populism in the political scene in Europe.

Nationalism

The subcategories of economic and politico-ideological theories of Llobera's classification of authors that propose definitions of a nation and nationalism theories, as well as social communications theory,⁷ can illuminate definitions of nationalism in order to better understand the appeal of nationalist rhetoric used by nationalist and populist parties and why nationalism is a powerful political ideology. Various theories attempt to explain what constructs a nation. Ernest Gellner's definition focuses on the idea of inventing a nation in the age of industrialization.⁸ For Gellner, a nationalist movement is one that feels satisfied with the

⁷ Classification by theory/school is based on Josep R. Llobera. "Recent Theories of Nationalism." *Cite Seer X at Penn State*, The Institut De Ciències Polítiques i Socials (ICPS), 1999.

⁸ Ibid.

fulfillment of the nationalist principle,⁹ and anger at its violation. Gellner provides two definitions of a nation: cultural and voluntarist. Cultural nationalism is the sharing of a culture among members of a nation, which includes a set of ideas, characters and ways of communication. The latter defines nation through a mutual recognition of members without the prerequisite of shared characteristics.¹⁰ Another economic explanation, but from a Marxist perspective, is provided by Eric Hobsbawm. Hobsbawm's definition of a nation is focused around the idea of bottom-up construction.¹¹ Hobsbawm asserts that the development of a nation is "situated at the point of intersection of politics, technology and social transformation", placing a special emphasis on language.¹² Therefore, both Hobsbawm and Gellner emphasize the idea that the nation is constructed and is intrinsically connected to the economic context of society. Benedict Anderson, whose definition fits the social communications theoretical subgroup, makes a modernization and constructivist argument of a nation both seen as limited and sovereign.¹³ The cultural construction of a nation¹⁴ is especially evident in Anderson's famous assertion of a nation as an "imagined community". The members of a nation, Anderson argues, still have a communal perception of a nation even despite of not knowing most of their compatriots, and therefore the nation is built based on an acknowledgement of the commonality rather than the

⁹ The "nationalist principle" is often defined as the right of each nation to secede, with every nation having an entitlement to its own state: Wellman, Christopher Heath. "The Truth in the Nationalist Principle." *Liberal Rights and Responsibilities: Essays on Citizenship and Sovereignty*: Oxford University Press, 2013-10-01. Oxford Scholarship Online. 2013-09-26. Date Accessed 23 Apr. 2018.

¹⁰ Renan as quoted in Lucie's Blog. "Anderson versus Gellner: A Typological Comparison of Two Nationalism Concepts." *Lucie's Blog*, Blogspot, 30 May 2012.

¹¹ E. Zuelow, *The Nationalism Project: Books by Author G-H*. Web. 2017

¹² Eric Hobsbawm as quoted in E. Zuelow in *The Nationalism Project: Books by Author G-H*. Web. 2017

¹³ Benedict Anderson as cited in E. Zuelow, *The Nationalism Project: Benedict Anderson's Definition of "Nation."*. Web 2017

¹⁴ E. Zuelow in *The Nationalism Project: Books by Author A-B*. Web 2017.

shared commonality itself.¹⁵ The paper will focus on a constructivist approach, for the nationalist and populist movements “construct” their definitions of what constitutes “a nation” and “the people” through the lens of the “imagined community”.

Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson’s contributions to defining a nation demonstrate the richness of the study on the emergence of a nation, and are considered pillars of the debate on the definition. The differences in defining the nation support the argument that nationalists should not be perceived even within one nation or ethnic group as unitary actors.¹⁶ The context of the nationalist movement should be examined to gain knowledge on what is understood under “nation”, and referring back to the Gellner’s definition, what constitutes the nationalist principle that, if violated, would cause anger among members of the group. This paper will adopt a broad definition of nation as a group of people with acknowledged commonality, the emergence of which is explained by the modernization school or a host of theories that emphasize the emergence of a nation as a result of transition from traditional to modern society.¹⁷ This group’s following of nationalist principle creates in-group and out-group division.¹⁸ “Nationalism” is commonly referred to explain the attitude of caring for one’s national identity, which emerges among members of a nation, as well as the actions undertaken in the process of seeking to achieve or preserve self-determination by those members.¹⁹ Therefore, in this research paper,

¹⁵ Finkel, M. "Theories of Nationalism: A Brief Comparison of Realist and Constructivist Ideas of the Nation." *Inquiries Journal*, 8(10). 2016.

¹⁶ Page 22: Barrington, Lowell W. “After Independence Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States. ‘Nationalism and Independence.’” Edited by Lowell W. Barrington, *University of Michigan Press*, University of Michigan Press, 2006.

¹⁷ Josep R. Llobera. “Recent Theories of Nationalism.” *Cite Seer X at Penn State*, The Institut De Ciències Polítiques i Socials (ICPS), 1999.

¹⁸ For in-group and out-group division see Tajfel, Henri. “Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination.” *Oxford University Press*, pp. 96–102. Lund University Cognitive Science Website.

¹⁹ Miscevic, Nenad. “Nationalism.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 29 Nov. 2001.

nationalist movements would be referred to as groups of people undertaking actions that would align with the abovementioned attitude of caring for national identity while simultaneously attempting to underscore and protect it.

Populism

Since 1960s, the “chameleonic” nature of the concept of populism was noted, and even its conceptual slipperiness.²⁰ The emergence of populism is often attributed to a number of causes, including modernization and globalization. In populist literature, two causal mechanisms stand out: the “mass society thesis”, which argues that populism is caused by groups focused on the preservation of culture and reacting to feelings of identity loss, as well as the economic thesis, which argues that populism was caused by an economic incentive for support based on “spatial and materialist conceptions of political representations”^{21, 22} In this research paper, populism will be considered under the “ideational approach”, which regards populism as an ideology and worldview, and how it manifests itself in the political context of Europe.²³ Cas Mudde provides the following comprehensive definition of populism: “a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an

²⁰ Taggart 2000 as quoted in page 3: Sergiu Gherghina and Sorina Soare, “Introduction: Populism - A Sophisticated Concept and Diverse Political Realities” in “Contemporary Populism : A Controversial Concept and Its Diverse Forms”, edited by Sergiu Gherghina, et al., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central.

²¹ See Downsian “economic” thesis represented in “the rational voter theorem” of voters choosing to cast votes based on their economic benefit: Kristof, Pete. “Voting - Relationship between Economic Factors and the Probability to Vote on Populist Parties: A Study of 2006 Swedish Election to Parliament.” *DIVA*, JÖNKÖPING International Business School, June 2007.

²² Pages 268-269: Rydgren (2007) as cited in Kira A. Hawkins, Madeleine Read, and Teun Pauwels “Populism and Its Causes” (Chapter 14) in Rovira Kaltwasser, Cristóbal., Paul A. Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy. *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017.

²³ Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'What is populism?' in Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, 2017; online edn, Very Short Introductions online, Feb. 2017).

expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.” Thin-centered ideology implies a worldview with a restricted ideological basis and principles, and that is why populism attaches and even assimilates into other ideologies.²⁴ There has been an attempt to highlight some common concepts of populism, and they have been identified as follows: idealization of “the people”, statism, faith in extraordinary qualities of a leader, pervasiveness of racism, xenophobia and/or anti-Semitism in discourse, use of conspiracy theories, nostalgic view of the past or appeal to religion, anti-elitism, as well as the promotion of an organic society.²⁵ The flexible nature of the ideology also makes it hard to identify populism on the political arena, when often populist claims can be made by parties that do not adhere to the ideology or even oppose some of the abovementioned concepts.²⁶

Debates exist on the defining features of populism, specifically on what is meant under “the people”, “the elite”, and the general will. The concept of “the people” is constructed, is defined in relation to its opposition against “the elite”, and manifests itself in three ways. The people act as sovereign, or the locus of political power, as the common people, or the group “excluded from power due to their sociocultural and socioeconomic status”, as well as the nation, either tied to the civic or ethnic notion of nationalism.²⁷ There are two types of populism: exclusive and inclusive. Exclusive populism manifests itself in politics in shutting out

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The index created by Isaiah Berlin et al as quoted in pages 3-4: Sergiu Gherghina and Sorina Soare, “Introduction: Populism - A Sophisticated Concept and Diverse Political Realities” in “Contemporary Populism : A Controversial Concept and Its Diverse Forms”, edited by Sergiu Gherghina, et al., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁶ Some of the mentioned concepts, such as faith in extraordinary qualities of a leader, are found in fascist ideology. See Matthews, Richard & Davison, Andrew. (2017). “Can Madison Trump Trump?”, 16 for more on fascism and populism.

²⁷ Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'What is populism?' in Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, 2017; online edn, Very Short Introductions online, Feb. 2017).

marginalized groups, such as Roma in Europe, while inclusive populism focuses on accepting marginalized groups into politics, such as in the political context of Latin America.²⁸ “The elite” is often referred to the politically powerful group which stands in opposition to “the people” and has previously betrayed them through its abuse of power and corruption. As a consequence the current elite has to be replaced by populist leaders in order to adequately represent “the people”.

²⁹ As for the general will, it embodies the ability of oppressed groups to challenge the elite imposed status quo in defense of their political demands, which represent their interest and “common sense”, often through democratic mechanisms such as referenda. It may lead to dreams of anti-political utopias and authoritarian tendencies.³⁰ In this research paper, populist movements will be those who could be identified as promoting the ideology of exclusive populism and manifest commonly identified populist core ideas and principles within the European political context.

Nationalism and Populism: Differences and Similarities of Concepts

The interchangeable use of terms of nationalism and populism in discourse is erroneous, which is illustrated by the abovementioned differences in theoretical background and definitions of the two. However, there are a host of reasons why the two often accompany each other, especially in the attempt to describe the political scene in Europe. Benjamin de Cleen asserts that the concepts of nationalism and populism are closely related empirically and conceptually and

²⁸“What Is Populism?” The Economist Explains, *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, 19 Dec. 2016.

²⁹ Christa Deiwijs. “Populism.” *Center for Comparative and International Studies, ETH Zurich and University of Zurich Living Reviews in Democracy*, 2009, ETH Zurich, June 2009.

³⁰ Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'What is populism?' in Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, 2017; online edn, Very Short Introductions online, Feb. 2017).

revolve around the concept of sovereignty.³¹ However, the two terms can be conflated and some may criticize populism when they actually are addressing exclusionary nationalism, the creation of in-groups and out-groups based on ethnic-cultural background. The uniqueness of populism is that it aims to represent “the people” across national borders, while nationalism, though can also represent groups that extend through borders, is intrinsically tied to a nation, in many cases tied to a specific territory. On the other hand, according to de Cleen, in the European context the two have been reconciled in the populist right embracing the ideology of exclusionary nationalism in the form “protecting” European identity against Islamisation.³² Moreover, the authors of the Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies state that the most convincing interconnectedness of populism and nationalism is manifested in the European radical right-wing parties, whose ideology consists of authoritarianism, nativism, and populism.³³ This interconnectedness of ideologies in modern radical right-wing European politics is the phenomenon that the paper attempts to explain, and for the large part will refer to. Despite the challenge of defining concepts and the danger of conflating them, it is important to acknowledge that such challenge is inescapable due to the “thin ideology” nature of populism and its easiness of attaching itself to other ideologies, including nationalism, and therefore the two should be used with caution and in alignment with the political movements or politicians’ ideological principles.

³¹ Sovereignty is defined here as the power to make political decisions independently.

³² Benjamin de Cleen. “Populism and Nationalism.” *Final Draft of a Chapter to Be Published in the Handbook of Populism, Edited by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy. Oxford: Oxford University Press (in Press, 2017).*

³³ Page 6: Brown, Thomas. “Populism and Nationalism: Implications for the International Order.” *House of Lords Library Note* , UK Parliament, 12 Jan. 2017.

Empirical Background

The empirical background section first examines the commonalities in the historic background of the three case studies: post-communist transition and the accession to the EU in 2004. Then this section analyzes the empirical background of each case with specific references to political parties and politicians. From the empirical background of the examined CEECs a common pattern includes being gaining independence through democratic protest from the Soviet Union and then undergoing a period of democratic transition, with common measures including “shock therapy” in the economic realm and change of electoral systems and lustration in the political realm. Another pattern includes a presence of a pro-EU government in power post-independence, usually led by some of the leaders who became prominent during the transition, and a shift to a Eurosceptic government some time after joining the EU. There are differences in the economic development of the states, which arises from economic advantages of the state, policy during the Soviet times, and the economic measures that were employed during the transition. Although strong support for populist politicians is common across the three cases, the design of political systems, bilateral relations with the EU, individual politicians’ scandals, and the unique nature of civil society and political participation stand out as prominent differences in the examined cases of Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic.

Post-Communist Transition

“Transition” is used to describe the period of political, economic and social transformation that has occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union in previously communist countries.³⁴ Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia were considered Satellite States of

³⁴ Balcerowicz, Leszek. “Post-Communist Transition: Some Lessons.” *Institute of Economic Affairs*, 2002.

the Soviet Union, and have regained their independence in 1989 after a series of revolutions and protests against the Soviet rule. The changes to come were foreshadowed by the programs of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.³⁵ After the fall of the state controlled economy, transition countries had undergone the process of privatization, market-oriented reform, emergence of private entrepreneurship, and construction of social structures and new institutions. Although initial conditions are important in explaining the divergence of the outcomes of transition, political and economic decisions illuminate this difference.³⁶ It is important to note that out of 28 post-Soviet states, 8 have emerged as consolidated democracies in the status quo. Eastern and Central European states have demonstrated a convergence with EU-15 countries on quality of democracy and economic affluence.³⁷ Some attribute the democratization of Eastern and Central Europe to structural factors such as location, level of development, and the influence of external actors. In the case of CEECs, those factors include choosing democratic systems during transitions, as well as gravitating towards Western democracy through engagement with EU and NATO.³⁸ The dissolution of the economic system that united the Soviet Union (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), a large welfare state, and other factors have resulted in economic downturn, high inflation, and recession among the post-Soviet states. The post-Soviet CEECs success in economic development relative to the other post-Soviet states can be explained by an adoption of

³⁵ James Roaf, Ruben Atoyan, Bikas Joshi, Krzysztof Krogulski and an IMF Staff Team. "25 Years of Transition Post-Communist Europe and the IMF: Regional Economic Issues Special Report." *IMF*, IMF, Oct. 2014.

³⁶ Pages 13-14: Balcerowicz, Leszek. "Post-Communist Transition: Some Lessons." *Institute of Economic Affairs*, 2002.

³⁷ Ekiert, Grzegorz. "Eastern Europe's Postcommunist Transformations." *World Politics Review*, 20 Mar. 2012

³⁸ *Ibid.*

more front-loaded and bold economic reforms,³⁹ including “shock therapy”. The accession to the European Union had also contributed to a facilitation of market economic reforms and adoption of democratic principles by political elites.

2004 Enlargement of the European Union

In 2004, the EU welcomed 10 new members, making it the largest expansion in the history of the supranational union. Eight of the new members were former Soviet states.⁴⁰ This enlargement is referred to as the Big Bang Enlargement due to the unprecedented number of states joining simultaneously. The accession of 2004 brought the EU population to 450 million.⁴¹ The first steps of negotiations with the European Union started in 1988 with the permission given by Gorbachev to Comecon countries to negotiate with the EEC, and later with the Phare programme (Poland and Hungary Assistance for the Restructuring of the Economy) in 1989. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development was created in 1991 to better aid post-Soviet countries in economic development. The former Soviet CEECs started to apply for membership in the EU since mid-1990s. European Association Agreements were signed on a bilateral basis. In order to join, the states needed to fulfill economic and political criteria, as well as implement the *acquis*.⁴² The abovementioned criteria that were necessary to be met for admission to the EU have later become known as the Copenhagen Criteria, which included stable democratic institutions, rule of law, protection of human rights, as well as protection of

³⁹ James Roaf, Ruben Atoyan, Bikas Joshi, Krzysztof Krogulski and an IMF Staff Team. “25 Years of Transition Post-Communist Europe and the IMF: Regional Economic Issues Special Report.” *IMF*, IMF, Oct. 2014.

⁴⁰ CNN World. “EU Welcomes 10 New Members.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 1 May 2004.

⁴¹ *Ibid*.

⁴² CVCE. “European Community Aid to the Former Eastern Bloc.” *CVCE by Uni.lu*, The University of Luxembourg’s CVCE.eu, 2015.

minorities.⁴³ Economic criteria included “a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU”. Institutional requirements consisted of implementing the *acquis*, adherence to the political, economic, and monetary union, as well as fulfilling the responsibilities posed by membership.⁴⁴ Thus, the EU conditionality for CEECs was focused mainly neo-liberal economic reform and adoption of EU-compatible governance.⁴⁵ The CEECs and the EU were in regular contact to evaluate progress on the EU accession criteria.

There were several critical evaluations of the accession process itself, as well as highlighting of the difficulties that hampered the process. There was opposition to Eastern bloc membership posed by EU-15,⁴⁶ as well as challenges the accession would pose to the EU structure. The EU had to make internal changes outlined in the Treaty of Nice (2000), such as changes to the composition of Commission and in regards to majority voting in anticipation of the accession of the Eastern bloc.⁴⁷ According to Pridham, some claim that the EU criteria were too stringent and inflexible in light of the historical context of political uncertainty and economic downturn of transition, while others contend that the transition process was facilitated by the accession and EU membership has been an important factor in explaining its relative success among CEECs. The European Commission was caught in the “democratic deficit” through not

⁴³ When referring to democracy and democratic norms in this paper, the definition based on the Copenhagen criteria is employed, focusing on liberal democratic ideology.

⁴⁴ “Accession Criteria (Copenhagen Criteria).” *Glossary of Summaries - EUR-Lex*, EUR-Lex Access to European Union Law.

⁴⁵ Jimmy Oliver Milanese. “Europeanization in Central Eastern European Democratic Transition: a Multi-Level Explanation Approach.” *Paper Prepared for Presentation at the YEN Research Meeting November 2 -3, 2001 Siena, Italia*.

⁴⁶ Page 15: Cameron, David R. “The Challenges of EU Accession for Post-Communist Europe*.” *Center for European Studies Central and Eastern European Working Paper Series #60*, Archive of European Integration, University of Pittsburgh, 2004.

⁴⁷ Page 2: Cameron, David R. “The Challenges of EU Accession for Post-Communist Europe*.” *Center for European Studies Central and Eastern European Working Paper Series #60*, Archive of European Integration, University of Pittsburgh, 2004

having a standard of democracy, but a “list” system for monitoring political conditions, and also responding to conditionality in a bureaucratic manner rather than a political one. However, it should be credited that the Commission had reformed its approach to conditionality, especially in the question of democracy,⁴⁸ as a result of the experience of welcoming the Eastern bloc.

The EU conditionality required serious political and economic changes that had effects on the CEECs development that were not a part of the transition process. For example, during the Monitoring Reports, the EU would demand immediate action on certain policy areas for member states, such as adherence to agricultural laws.⁴⁹ The conditionality applied to CEECs also had a pervasive effect on new institutions and policies by transforming domestic political behaviours.⁵⁰ The overall attitude of the European Commission was an assertion that pressure to adhere to the *acquis* would not be reduced after membership, though shortcomings would not delay the accession process, in the end requiring compliance with the *acquis*.⁵¹ The difficulties of the accession witnessed by citizens had resulted in an ambivalence of public opinion towards the process, and later contributed to the increased support for Eurosceptic politicians and parties among the Eastern bloc. Such politicians and parties have also gained support among constituency in at the time 25 members of the EU, which was clearly evident through the

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Pridham. “Assessing Democratic Consolidation in Central & Eastern Europe: the European Dimension.” *Paper for European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), University of Granada, 14-19 April 2005, Workshop on The Performance of Democracy in Central & Eastern Europe.*

⁴⁹ Pages 3-4: Cameron, David R. “The Challenges of EU Accession for Post-Communist Europe*.” *Center for European Studies Central and Eastern European Working Paper Series #60, Archive of European Integration, University of Pittsburgh, 2004.*

⁵⁰ Jimmy Oliver Milanese. “Europeanization in Central Eastern European Democratic Transition: a Multi-Level Explanation Approach.” *Paper Prepared for Presentation at the YEN Research Meeting November 2 -3, 2001 Siena, Italia.*

⁵¹ Pages 3-4: Cameron, David R. “The Challenges of EU Accession for Post-Communist Europe*.” *Center for European Studies Central and Eastern European Working Paper Series #60, Archive of European Integration, University of Pittsburgh, 2004.*

example of 2004 European Parliamentary elections.⁵² Despite of the difficulties posed by the accession process, the former Soviet states joined the European Union officially on May 1st, 2004, after the process of ratification of the 2003 treaty has taken place. The Big Bang enlargement was met with celebrations across Europe. The President of Poland at the time has commemorated the event as a “... dream is becoming reality” of Poland reuniting with its European family.⁵³ The Big Bang enlargement welcomed Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, while Bulgaria and Romania had joined with a delay in 2007.

Historical and Political Background of Case Studies in the 20-21st Century

Poland

Poland has entered the 20th century as a nation with partitioned territory among Russia, Prussia, and Austria. After World War I, the Reconstruction of Poland took place. During WWII, Poland was invaded by both Nazi Germany and Russia, with land split between the two according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Poland had suffered dramatic losses of millions of citizens during World War II. After World War II, Polish People’s Republic as a part of the Soviet Union was under communist rule until 1989. The Soviet system began to be challenged with the 1970s workers movement “Solidarity”, headed by Lech Walesa and supported by the Catholic Church, and in 1989 Poland regained its independence. Lech Walesa was elected President of Poland in 1990 and market reforms and privatization were launched. The Balcerowicz Plan, named after Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz, began the “shock therapy”

⁵² Page 9: Cameron, David R. “The Challenges of EU Accession for Post-Communist Europe*.” *Center for European Studies Central and Eastern European Working Paper Series #60*, Archive of European Integration, University of Pittsburgh, 2004.

⁵³ CNN World. “EU Welcomes 10 New Members.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 1 May 2004.

of stabilization and liberalization of the economy.⁵⁴ First free elections to parliament were held in 1991. Former communist party became “Social Democrats” and actively participated in political elections.⁵⁵ In the realm of political changes, in 1990 an amendment to the constitution established direct presidential elections, creating a system of a parliamentary cabinet model with a president elected by popular vote, which later had led to clashes between presidents and prime ministers. The political system was not consolidated in Poland until the beginning of the 21st century. It is often mentioned that the “generation of 1989”, or the political elite that was formed during the fall of the Soviet rule in 1989, is still at the forefronts of the political scene and party divisions in Poland today. The 1990s were a process of decommunization for Poland, during which a new order was constructed in CEECs throughout political, economic, educational and others sectors of society in order to establish a liberal-democratic system.⁵⁶ Poland had adopted a new constitutions in 1997 and became a member of NATO in 1999.⁵⁷

The 21st century was profoundly shaped by joining the EU in 2004. In the economic realm, GDP per capita of Poland has increased 7.3 times from 1990 to 2015, demonstrating a successful economic transition and the highest economic growth among all OECD states.⁵⁸ After accession, there was a rhetoric among older members of the EU about CEECs workers taking jobs away from their citizens as a result of free movement⁵⁹ and protectionist measures. However, the countries that opened their markets to migration from Poland the earliest, United

⁵⁴ Johnson, Simon, and Gary W Loveman. “Starting Over: Poland After Communism.” *Harvard Business Review*, 1995

⁵⁵ Reuters. “Timeline: Key Events in Poland since End of Communism.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 11 Aug. 2007.

⁵⁶ Dudek, Antoni. “The Consequence of the System Transformation of 1989 in Poland.” *Remembrance and Solidarity Studies (3rd Issue)*, European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, 19 Aug. 2015.

⁵⁷ Lambert, Tim. “A Brief History of Poland.” *Local Histories*, 2017.

⁵⁸ Cipiur, Jan. “Central European Financial Observer.” *Financial Observer*, 15 May 2017.

⁵⁹ Sciolino, Elaine. “Unlikely Hero in Europe's Spat: The 'Polish Plumber'.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 26 June 2005.

Kingdom and Ireland, have reaped the highest post-accession economic gains.⁶⁰ In regards to internal politics, in 2005, Lech Kaczyński became President with the platform focused on combating corruption, and his election marked a shift in politics from pro-European to more Eurosceptic and conservative.⁶¹ According to Dabrowski, Polish citizens became polarized between the Kaczynski's Law and Justice (PiS), a more nationalist and Eurosceptic party, and Donald Tusk's Civic Platform, a pro-EU one. Another significant event for Poland was the tragedy of 2010, the presidential plane crash which was on its way to commemorate the anniversary of Katyn' massacres, in which the lives of many prominent political figures of the country were lost. After the period of mourning, consequent elections were won by the Civic Platform party and Bronislaw Komorowski. In 2011, under the leadership of Komorowski and Tusk, Poland assumed a half-year long presidency of the European Council.⁶² The current President of Poland Andrzej Duda comes from the conservative PiS party, and has recently been widely criticized for passing the controversial bill which bans from accusing "the Polish nation" of complicity in the Holocaust".⁶³ A Eurosceptic view is especially prevalent regarding the issue of immigration, which is supported by the following statement by Prime Minister Morawiecki: "In terms of migration and quotas that were to be imposed on (EU) member countries we strongly reject such an approach as it infringes on sovereign decisions of member states"⁶⁴, and is

⁶⁰ Fihel et al as cited in Böröcz, József, and Mahua Sarkar. "The Unbearable Whiteness of the Polish Plumber and the Hungarian Peacock Dance around 'Race.'" *Slavic Review*, Volume 76, Issue 2. Summer 2017, pp. 307-314. *Cambridge Core*, Cambridge University Press, 7 July 2017.

⁶¹ Epilogue: Dabrowski, Patrice M. "Poland : The First Thousand Years", Northern Illinois University Press, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Santora, Marc. "Poland's President Supports Making Some Holocaust Statements a Crime." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 6 Feb. 2018.

⁶⁴ Marcin Gocłowski, Krisztina Than. "Hungary, Poland Demand Bigger Say in EU, Reject Its Migration Policy." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 3 Jan. 2018.

supported by Eurosceptic citizens. Others accuse the Kaczynskis, leaders of PiS, for creating a “demokratura”, or a Polish version of a mix between democracy and dictatorship.⁶⁵

Hungary

At the end of the 19th century, Hungary was a part of a dual monarchy of “Austria the empire, Hungary the kingdom”. After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, World War I broke out in Europe. Post-World War I, Hungary was partitioned and millions of Hungarians found themselves outside their countries’ original borders. Entering the war as an Axis power in 1941, Hungary was later invaded by the Germans in an attempt to sign an armistice with the Allied powers.⁶⁶ Hungary had lost many civilians during the war and suffered serious economic damage. Hungary became a Soviet satellite state and was under communist rule until 1989. The anti-communist Hungarian Revolution of 1956 had led to the leadership of János Kádár, under whom Hungary became more open to free market measures and lessened political oppression, thus adopting a modified system referred to as “Goulash Communism”⁶⁷. The opening of borders with Austria in 1989 to aid refugees to West Germany preceded the fall of the Soviet rule. In addition, Open Roundtable Talks created in 1989, which were meetings among opposition groups (including the political parties SzDSz, Fidesz, MDF, the Independent Smallholders’ Party, the Hungarian People’s Party and others), had later led to a peaceful transition of power and multiparty system in the country.⁶⁸ In 1991, the Soviet forces left the country and the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. Former communists and liberals form a coalition

⁶⁵ Buckley, Neil. “Long-Term Polish Dissident Braced for Fresh Battle.” *Financial Times*, 27 Jan. 2017.

⁶⁶ International Visegrad Fund. “Brief History of Hungary.” *The Visegrad Group: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia*, (C) 2006-2010, International Visegrad Fund, 18 Sept. 2006.

⁶⁷ Pike, John. “Hungary History - 1956-1966 - Goulash Communism.” *GlobalSecurity.org*, 2011.

⁶⁸ International Visegrad Fund. “Brief History of Hungary.” *The Visegrad Group: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia*, (C) 2006-2010, International Visegrad Fund, 18 Sept. 2006.

after elections in 1990, and in 1998 a coalition under Viktor Orbán was elected. Hungary joins NATO in 1999 and Ferenc Madl is elected President in 2000.⁶⁹ During the economic transition, Hungary did not adopt a bold “shock therapy” approach as Poland, but took a more “gradualist” approach to transformation.⁷⁰ The Bokros Austerity Package that included privatisation and austerity measures was able to set the country on a path of sustainable economic growth.⁷¹

In May 2004, Hungary joined the EU with a referendum held prior accepting membership with less than a 50% turnout. In 2006, a Socialist-led coalition under Ferenc Gyurcsany came to power (nominated as PM by the Hungarian Socialist Party MSZP), however, protest erupted against the Prime Minister Gyurcsany after a scandal of the party lying during campaign. Consequently, since 2010 there has been high support for right-wing political parties in Hungarian politics, specifically the Fidesz party and Jobbik. Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz won parliamentary elections in both 2010 and 2014. Controversial political measures such as restrictions on the media, registration of some NGOs as foreign organizations, and attempts to close down the Central European University cause concern about support for democracy in Hungary, especially from the EU. As opposed to the Polish government’s condemnation of the annexation of Crimea, the Hungarian government has spoken against sanctions on Russia and secured economic deals with Russia on the nuclear station at Paks. Serious disagreements with the EU on immigration and refugees persist.⁷² In the economic realm, Hungary had received 20 billion euros from the IMF, EU and World Bank to recover from the 2008 financial crisis. After

⁶⁹ “Hungary Timeline.” *BBC News*, BBC, 14 Feb. 2012.

⁷⁰ Slay, Ben. “Transition from Planned to Market Economy: Hungary and Poland Compared’: A Comment.” *ScienceDirect*, Studies in Comparative Communism Volume 25, Issue 4, December 1992, Pages 335-340, 6 Nov. 2002.

⁷¹ Page 1: Csizmadia, Lidia. “The Transition Economy of Hungary between 1990 and 2004.” *Aarhus School of Business University of Aarhus*, June 2008.

⁷² “Hungary Profile - Timeline.” *BBC News*, BBC, 5 Mar. 2018.

a policy of austerity measures, in 2012 the EU still had to suspend aid measures due to budget deficit. Although Hungary has recovered from the recession,⁷³ it showed the slowest economic growth among the Visegrad countries and is heavily dependent on EU funding.⁷⁴ Therefore, the Hungarian case stands out with the severity of democratic backsliding and difficulty of economic recovery.

Czech Republic

Previously a part of Austria Hungary under the Kingdom of Bohemia, after World War I the Czech Republic became an independent state of Czechoslovakia. In 1938, then part of Czechoslovakia Sudetenland was overtaken by Germany through the Munich Agreement, and later Czechoslovakia was fully invaded and Slovakia seceded. After WWII, Czechoslovakia was established as a country. The communist party gained popularity in Czechoslovakia, consolidated power, and later organized a coup in 1948. Until 1989, the country remained a part of the communist Eastern bloc. The 1960s marked a time of political and economic liberalization under Alexander Dubcek, however, it was thwarted by the Soviet invasion of 1968. The fall of the Soviet rule was preceded by the Velvet Revolution, or protests led by Czech citizens against the communist government, and was later followed by the “Velvet Divorce”, the peaceful separation of Slovakia. Vaclav Havel, a prominent figure in the resistance, became the first President of independent Czech Republic.⁷⁵ The economic shift in the country was made through two voucher reforms, or privatization conducted through the distribution of low priced shares of

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The Hungarian Prime Minister's Office economic study results, according to Hungarian online news portal napi.hu., as quoted in Keszthelyi, Christian. “Hungary's Economy Heavily Depends on EU Funds, Study Finds.” *Budapest Business Journal*, 30 Mar. 2017.

⁷⁵ “Czech History.” *CzechSite: Czech History*, CzechSite Travel Guide , 2017.

previously communist owned industry to citizens.⁷⁶ Although at first the former Soviet republic showed strong economic growth, even deemed as the “Czech miracle”, the trend was reversed by the 1997 economic crisis and subsequent resignation of Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus.⁷⁷ In the political scene, two major parties stand out: the Czech Social Democratic Party (center-right) and the Civic Democratic Party (center-right, Vaclav Klaus’ ODS, emerged from Civic Forum created by Havel on the basis of civil society groups during Velvet Revolution).⁷⁸ The Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999.

In the realm of economics, Czech Republic has experienced significant economic growth after the end of 1990s crisis and consequent austerity measures. Although some falterings occurred, sustainable growth and economic rebounds have led to the former Soviet state becoming one of the fastest-growing in Europe with a standard of living higher than other post-communist CEECs. The Czech Republic was able to avoid some of the downturn from the 2008 European debt crisis because the country was not a part of Eurozone but was able to enjoy the benefits of an open market,⁷⁹ and currently continues to retain its own currency along with Poland and Hungary. As for the political scene, ODS⁸⁰ and Social Democrats, as well as other center to moderate left pro-EU parties, have been most prevalent until the emerged support for Eurosceptic groups, for the most part “Action of Dissatisfied Citizens” (ANO) led by current

⁷⁶ Page 102: Janik, Zdenek. “Twenty Years after the Iron Curtain: The Czech Republic in Transition .” *Juniata Voices*, pp. 99–107.

⁷⁷ Andrew Stroehlein with Jan Culik, Steven Saxonberg and Kazi Stastna. “The Czech Republic 1992 to 1999: From Unintentional Political Birth to Prolonged Political Crisis.” *Central Europe Review*, Vol 1, No 12 13 September 1999 Special Feature, 1999.

⁷⁸ Hauner, Milan, and Miroslav Blazek. “Czech Republic.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 13 Mar. 2018.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ ODS and Vaclav Klaus were noted for voicing a Eurosceptic position. See DONALD A. HEMPSON III. “Becoming 'European:' The Diverging Paths of the Czech and Slovak Republics | Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective.” *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective Vol. 2, Issue 11* , The History Departments at The Ohio State University and Miami University, Aug. 2009.

Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and the right-wing Freedom & Direct Democracy party led by Tomio Okamura. ANO had gained 2nd place in the parliamentary elections of 2013, and won the 2017 elections, running on the issues of corruption, immigration, and anti-establishment.⁸¹ As for the relations with the EU in the post-2004 accession period, Czech Republic held a rotating EU Presidency in 2009. There exists a mixed attitude in supporting EU cooperation, which was especially prevalent in the stances that Czech Republic took towards foreign policy issues such as war in Iraq and conflict in Georgia, at times conflicting with those from the EU.⁸² The economic benefit of EU membership while simultaneous public support of Eurosceptic PM Andrej Babiš demonstrates the overall CEECs dynamic that the paper attempts to explain.

Potential Explanations

The Transition-based Explanation

Transition from communism, as noted previously in the empirical background section, was a profound economic, political, and institutional change. A closer analysis of those changes reveals the conditions that facilitated political mobilization and support for nationalist and populist rhetoric. Milada Anna Vachudova captures this profound and multi-faceted process of transition for citizens as a shift from:

“...one-party rule in politics, planning in the economy, atomization in society, and the abrogation of human rights; the system was held together with police terror, the threat of invasion, ideology, job security, and social benefits. They had all

⁸¹ Goeij, Hana De, and Rick Lyman. “Czech Election Won by Anti-Establishment Party Led by Billionaire.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 21 Oct. 2017.

⁸² DONALD A. HEMPSON III. “Becoming 'European.' The Diverging Paths of the Czech and Slovak Republics | Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective.” *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective Vol. 2, Issue 11*, The History Departments at The Ohio State University and Miami University, Aug. 2009

shed this system ... in order to build liberal democracies and market economies, where human rights, political pluralism, economic prosperity, and a cleaner environment would blossom...”⁸³

Firstly, the institutional shift led to the creation of unique CEECs institutions, in which the Soviet legacy was mixed with new Western style reforms in transitional countries. This term was coined as “recombinatory innovation”.⁸⁴ The Soviet legacy had its effect during the transition period because of its influence on “societal culture, ways of thinking, political ethics and decision making.”⁸⁵ The transition process was hampered by citizens lacking some skills such as entrepreneurial skills or sense of individual responsibility which are essential to the capitalist system. In addition to that discrepancy the way human capital was utilized by the two systems, many of post-Soviet citizens found themselves lacking the advantages of the communist system while not having redeemed the promises of the new system that they live in.⁸⁶

The rapid privatization and transfer to market economy had forced a severe cut of social benefits, including cuts in funding for schools, healthcare, and pensions. The incompatibility of the Soviet welfare system with the one that would have been required in the new market system is exemplified in the disability pension cuts in Poland: the spending on them was twice as much

⁸³ Page 1: Vachudova, Milada Anna. *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage and Integration after 1989*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁸⁴ Pages 3-4: Stark and Bruszt (1998) as cited in Balázs SZENT-IVÁNYI, and András TÉTÉNYI. “Transition and Foreign Aid Policies in the Visegrád Countries A Path Dependent Approach.” *Manuscript of the Paper Published in the Journal Transition Studies Review* (Vol. 15, No. 3, 2008), Corvinus Research Archive, no. Corvinus University of Budapest.

⁸⁵ Page 4: Balázs SZENT-IVÁNYI, and András TÉTÉNYI. “Transition and Foreign Aid Policies in the Visegrád Countries A Path Dependent Approach.” *Manuscript of the Paper Published in the Journal Transition Studies Review* (Vol. 15, No. 3, 2008), Corvinus Research Archive, no. Corvinus University of Budapest.

⁸⁶ Page 4: Greskovitz as quoted and cited in Balázs SZENT-IVÁNYI, and András TÉTÉNYI. “Transition and Foreign Aid Policies in the Visegrád Countries A Path Dependent Approach.” *Manuscript of the Paper Published in the Journal Transition Studies Review* (Vol. 15, No. 3, 2008), Corvinus Research Archive, no. Corvinus University of Budapest.

as the OECD average. This had led to an increased economic vulnerability among citizens and criticism towards the harshness of markets.⁸⁷ Moreover, research supports that citizens who could be considered “winners” from transition tend to support free market economy, and consequently are pro-EU, while the economic “losers” of transition are more likely to oppose membership.⁸⁸ Economic decline caused by transition, before the market reform was able to produce an economic rebound, produced an increase in poverty, inequality, and unemployment, which was a shock for a population that was used to equality and economic security. Economically induced public discontent among those vulnerable populations, exacerbated by the unequal distribution of benefits from growth, was later “preyed” upon by populist groups, in order to mobilize for support the “losers” of market reform and integration.⁸⁹ Therefore, institutional and human capital conflict, as well as the emergence of certain groups of “losers” from economic reform, in light of the specific welfare nature of the previous Soviet system, was a conducive environment for the increased support for populist and nationalist politicians who were able to demonstrate concern for the abovementioned issues of the segments of population economically disadvantaged by the transition. Populism is effective at making elites bring to attention issues they want to evade in politics,⁹⁰ and therefore the economically vulnerable groups from transition found the populist parties being the ones that brought to public light the

⁸⁷ Page 202: World Bank. “Eastern Europe’s Transition: Building Institutions.” *Country Note E. PRIVATIZATION AND DEREGULATION: A PUSH TOO FAR?* (Pp. 200-206). *Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform*, World Bank, 2005.

⁸⁸ Page 569: Tucker, Joshua A., Alexander C. Pacek and Adam J. Berinsky, “Transitional Winners and Losers: Attitudes toward EU Membership in Post-Communist Countries.” *American Journal of Political Science* Vol.46 ,No.3, July 2002, Pp.557-571. JSTOR, 2012.

⁸⁹ Page: 370: DAUDERSTÄDT, MICHAEL, and ANDRÉ W.M. GERRITS. “Democratisation After Communism: Progress, Problems, Promotion.” *IPG 4/2000. Pages: 361-376*, Bibliothek Der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2000.

⁹⁰ Cas Mudde as cited in “What Is Populism?” The Economist Explains, *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, 19 Dec. 2016.

concerns that seemed to be neglected by pro-EU and economic liberalisation supportive political groups and politicians.

The democratic transition has also affected political processes in a way that provided a platform for nationalist and populist groups. A democratic system may create a more conducive environment for national conflict, for example, due to the opportunity it gives to powerful nationalist groups for politicisation of their rhetoric, which was more limited to those groups during communist rule.⁹¹ The post-1989 period in the former Soviet Central and Eastern European states is marked with parties organizing along the lines of ideological cleavages on the basis of their view on how the process of national modernization had to be conducted.⁹² In the post-Soviet CEECs politics, “communists, socialists, neofascists, traditional conservatives, and populists” could be often found in groups of illiberal nationalists opposing democratic and liberal ideology.⁹³ The political leaders and parties that were opposed to the communist rule in CEECs often came to power after 1989. They embraced joining the EU, and democratizing as a part of the Copenhagen criteria even if it was not in their best interest, because joining EU became the central foreign policy goal of Visegrad countries.⁹⁴ As noted in the empirical background, the leaders of the revolutions and civic protests were supportive of joining the EU, led market reforms, and promoted liberal democratic values, and then became the political elites of many CEECs. However, it was easy for new parties to emerge and capture that electorate of “losers”

⁹¹ Page 368: DAUDERSTÄDT, MICHAEL, and ANDRÉ W.M. GERRITS. “Democratisation After Communism: Progress, Problems, Promotion.” *IPG 4/2000*. Pages: 361-376, Bibliothek Der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2000.

⁹² Kitschelt as cited in Flamm, László. “The Crisis and Euroscepticism in Central and Eastern Europe.” *L'Europe En Formation*, Centre International De Formation Européenne, 10 Dec. 2012.

⁹³ Page 66: Tismaneanu, Vladimir. *Fantasies of Salvation : Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, Princeton University Press, 1998. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁹⁴ Page 81: Vachudova, Milada Anna. *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage and Integration after 1989*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

from transition, and take the role of anti-establishment parties.⁹⁵ The specific nature of democratic resistance prior to 1989 and the process of transition, which had brought to power to liberal democratic and mostly pro-EU parties, allowed for nationalist and populist parties gain popularity when discontents arose over EU policy and other societal problems.

Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is as follows:

- ❖ The Soviet past and its conflict with the democratization and transition has contributed to the resurgence of nationalism in the status quo. Populist parties fed off economic and political grievances of the “people”, the “losers” of transition as a result of market reform and democratization, and used it to mobilize support through a Eurosceptic platform while creating an opposition movement to the ruling pro-EU parties. The populist narrative of anti-establishment politics was conveniently utilized in such arrangement.

Predictions of Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1 produces a set of predictions which includes an observed group of “losers” of transition that would actively support populist politicians. This group would have suffered from losing the Soviet welfare system, would lack skills necessary in the new system, and would express a nostalgia for some aspects of the economic policy during the Soviet Union. This group would be the one whose economic situation did not improve relative to others as a result of transition. A common reference to this group in statements, as well as economic policy targeted at the group, would be conducted by nationalist and populist parties. It would be evident that pro-EU politicians would become the political elite, and later would be challenged by Eurosceptic parties. A polarization between parties based on political ideologies and stance on

⁹⁵ Papp, Roland. “Making Sense of Central European Political Parties.” *Political Critique*, Krytyka Polityczna and European Alternatives, 13 Apr. 2016.

EU membership would be observed where the populist parties would pose as political opposition. They would manifest their opposition in anti-establishment statements of political parties and politicians.

The EU-based Explanation

The CEECs nationalist and populist parties were able to effectively mobilize in large part due to their Eurosceptic rhetoric. Although it could be argued that these parties could mobilize on the basis of issues such as immigration even in the absence of EU membership, it is often noted that criticisms of giving up sovereignty to Brussels is an important part of the political rhetoric of CEECs. The example of Hungary demonstrates the abovementioned dynamic: after the referendum on rejecting the imposed quota on refugees, Viktor Orbán later used the results to pass constitutional amendments that would ensure that the nation state is the basis of EU decision-making.⁹⁶ The speaker of the Polish Senate Stanislaw Karczewski has also advocated for a European Union where “solidarity and national sovereignty can coexist”.⁹⁷ As for the citizens of Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic, only a range of 31-53% of Eurobarometer respondents agreed that EU membership is a good thing for their country.⁹⁸ Beyond seeing the EU as a “scapegoat” for nationalist and populist parties, I aimed to find any reasons for public grievances against the EU or any other factors such as EU policy that could have provided a conducive environment for Eurosceptic rhetoric of nationalist and populist parties to receive

⁹⁶ Nič, Milan. “The Visegrád Group in the EU: 2016 as a turning-point?”. *European View* (2016) 15: 281. Springer Berlin.

⁹⁷ Stanislaw Karczewski as quoted in Euronews. “Poland, a Two-Speed EU and the Future of the Bloc in Central Europe.” *Euronews*, 13 Sept. 2017.

⁹⁸ Eurobarometer results for 2011 for the question “Generally speaking, do you think that (your country’s) membership of the European Union ...? (with options: is a good thing, bad thing, neither good nor bad, and don’t know)”: European Commission. “Eurobarometer Interactive.” *PublicOpinion*, DGs Public Opinion, 2011.

widespread support. It could be contended that grievances that accumulated during the prolonged accession period were used later by nationalist and populist parties as a mobilizing force. A common criticism of the EU was centered around the EU not fulfilling the promise of protection and return to European family of CEECs by delaying the accession and demanding immediate action on reform.

The link between the resurgence of populism and nationalism and the EU could be framed around the supranational union indirectly influencing democratization and perceptions of democracy, which then later were utilized by nationalist and populist parties. A debate exists concerning the causal mechanism between democratization during transition and EU accession. Vachudova states that EU merely reinforced the Visegrad movement towards democratization.⁹⁹ Most CEECs have reformed political system towards representative parliamentary ones during transition to promote democratization. The EU could have affected the nature of democratization that might have lead to a critical view of the EU, and consequently, of democracy overall. It is possible that EU accession with rigorous conditionality may cause the effect of strengthening executive and bureaucratic power in some states while widening the gap between political elites and citizens if parliamentary effectiveness and public participation are not reinforced. This dynamic is further amplified by the existent mistrust towards elites and institutions as a legacy of the post-Soviet past. For example, the EU approach to administrative reform in CEECs was more top down rather than based on participation or representation.¹⁰⁰ Dyson and Featherstone argue

⁹⁹ Page 81: Vachudova, Milada Anna. *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage and Integration after 1989*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

¹⁰⁰ D. Bechev and S. Andreev, *Top-Down vs Bottom-Up Aspects of the EU Institution- Building Strategies in the Western Balkans*, St Antony's College Oxford, South East European Studies Programme, Occasional Paper No. 3/05, February 2005 as cited in Geoffrey Pridham. "Assessing Democratic Consolidation In Central & Eastern Europe: the European Dimension." *Paper for European Consortium*

that compliance with economic requirements during Europeanization empowers technocrats and therefore changes the political landscape of the State.¹⁰¹ In an already weak state of democracy, bureaucratization and a lack of promotion of participation could have negatively affected the fragile process of democratization and citizens' view of democracy. The EU approach to democracy for a long time was formalistic or legal, which was not fitted to the context of inequality and corruption in CEECs, as the way that citizens perceive a political system is highly dependent on elite behaviour.¹⁰²

Concerns about the relationship between perceptions of democracy and the EU arose when Eurobarometer showed low results on satisfaction with the development of democracy. The score on a host of democracy-related questions ranged for years 1991-1998 as the following: for Poland - from 37 to 63%, for Hungary from 48 to 62, and for Czech Republic - from 60 to 77%.¹⁰³ However, as for the public perception of democracy for 2004, the year of EU accession, the average among CEECs respondents in favour of democracy was 57%, while 50% had positively evaluated the previous Soviet regime as evaluated on a public opinion survey.¹⁰⁴ As democratic transition was one of the main points of the Copenhagen criteria that CEECs had to overcome institutional and historical hurdles in order to comply with, the nature of EU

for Political Research (ECPR), University of Granada, 14-19 April 2005, Workshop on The Performance of Democracy in Central & Eastern Europe.

¹⁰¹ Jimmy Oliver Milanese. "Europeanization in Central Eastern European Democratic Transition: a Multi-Level Explanation Approach." *Paper Prepared for Presentation at the YEN Research Meeting November 2 -3, 2001 Siena, Italia.*

¹⁰² Page 12: Ágh, Attila. "The EU Polycrisis and Hard Populism in East -Central Europe: From the Copenhagen Dilemma to the Juncker Paradox." *Politics in Central Europe*, vol. 13, no. 2-3, 2017.

¹⁰³ Table 6 based on Eurobarometer analysis on a host of questions by DAUDERSTÄDT, MICHAEL, and ANDRÉ W.M. GERRITS. Page 369: DAUDERSTÄDT, MICHAEL, and ANDRÉ W.M. GERRITS. "Democratisation After Communism: Progress, Problems, Promotion." *IPG 4/2000. Pages: 361-376*, Bibliothek Der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2000.

¹⁰⁴ A public opinion survey results page 106 in Kornai János, *Szocializmus, Kapitalizmus, Demokrácia és Rendszerváltás* ["Socialism, Capitalism, Democracy and System Change"] year 2007, as cited in Flamm, László. "The Crisis and Euroscepticism in Central and Eastern Europe." *L'Europe En Formation*, Centre International De Formation Européenne, 10 Dec. 2012.

negotiations with post-Soviet states during accession could have also affected the way that citizens perceived democracy overall. It is argued that the “institutional tutors and pupils” dynamics of power relations between the EU and CEECs states was begrudged by the political and bureaucratic apparatus of former communist countries.¹⁰⁵ The Eastern Bloc countries argued that they were upheld to a rigorous standard of accession when they were only transitioning to democracy, while the EU was not as strictly monitoring its existing members’ corruption and abuse of minority rights.¹⁰⁶ When CEECs tried to bargain for concessions referring to their preceding disadvantaged situation, the attempts were not successful and the end result of negotiations disproportionately reflected the pre-existing member states’ interests.¹⁰⁷ And lastly, some even argue that the EU had an adverse effect on democratization in transition countries due to its own democratic deficit.¹⁰⁸ The populist and nationalist politicians reminding about the grievances against “arrogance” of the EU during accession negotiations, as well as appealing to the resentment towards democracy reflected by the relatively low Eurobarometer ratings for which the EU accession could have been one of the causal links, may have contributed to their recent increase in popularity. The EU democratic deficit and arrogant bargaining during accession, as well as putting in a more favored position interests of EU-15 members, had reinforced a negative perception of democracy.

¹⁰⁵ Jacoby 2001 as quoted in Page 5: Ekiert, Grzegorz. “Dilemmas of Europeanization: Eastern and Central Dilemmas of Europeanization: Eastern and Central Europe the EU Enlargement.” *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, Tomus 25, Pp. 1-28, Masarykovy Univerzity, 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Geoffrey Pridham. “Assessing Democratic Consolidation In Central & Eastern Europe: the European Dimension.” *Paper for European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), University of Granada, 14-19 April 2005, Workshop on The Performance of Democracy in Central & Eastern Europe.*

¹⁰⁷ Moravcsik and Vachudova (2003) as quoted in page 5: Ekiert, Grzegorz. “Dilemmas of Europeanization: Eastern and Central Dilemmas of Europeanization: Eastern and Central Europe the EU Enlargement.” *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, Tomus 25, Pp. 1-28, Masarykovy Univerzity, 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Ekiert, Grzegorz. “Dilemmas of Europeanization: Eastern and Central Dilemmas of Europeanization: Eastern and Central Europe the EU Enlargement.” *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, Tomus 25, Pp. 1-28, Masarykovy Univerzity, 2008.

In addition, the processes during the post-accession period can demonstrate what have contributed to the democratic backsliding. Firstly, after the accession process was over, the motivation to consolidate democracies among Eastern bloc states has weakened.¹⁰⁹ The EU is limited in preventing democratic backsliding after members join, which it is allowed to do under Article 7, however, the conditions for triggering the article are very demanding.¹¹⁰ The “Juncker paradox”, a term coined by Ágh to signify the inaction of the EU towards populism, including a contradictory and weak response,¹¹¹ is another reason that explains the flourishing of populist and nationalist parties. Ágh argues that populist regimes, when in power, can formally follow EU rules and regulations, creating a “democratic façade” while simultaneously failing to consolidate democracy or promote liberal democratic norms. Then the regime may take more steps to de-Europeanize and de-democratize, through steps such as an attack on civil society. The weak response to populist tendencies and violations of the rule of law in 2010s in former Soviet states had accumulated to a “polycrisis” by 2017, and the attempt of EU institutions to address hard populism at that point was deemed a “crisis of crisis management” and deepened the Core and Periphery divide in the EU, because the problems of the Core were put on a higher priority than addressing democratic backsliding in the Periphery.¹¹² The resurgence of Euroscepticism could be seen both through a failure of leaders of former Soviet states to think strategically about their place in the EU and of the EU leaders and institutions at addressing the problems of democratic

¹⁰⁹ Judy Dempsey. “The EU's Flawed Eastern Enlargement.” *Carnegie Europe*, Carnegie Endowment, 27 Feb. 2018.

¹¹⁰ Sedelmeier, Ulrich. “Europe after the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union: 2004-2014.” *Heinrich Böll Stiftung European Union*, 10 June 2014.

¹¹¹ Page 26: Ágh, Attila. “The EU Polycrisis and Hard Populism in East -Central Europe: From the Copenhagen Dilemma to the Juncker Paradox.” *Politics in Central Europe*, vol. 13, no. 2-3, 2017.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

consolidation.¹¹³ Therefore, the post-accession weaknesses of the EU in addressing populism and promoting a genuine democratic consolidation could be viewed as another reason for the resurgence of nationalism and populism.

Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is as follows:

- ❖ History of EU accession, specifically bargaining and the negative effect of conditionality on democratization, had led to a negative public perception of the EU and democracy. Grievances against the EU were used by populist parties to mobilize directly, and could also have contributed to their popularity indirectly as an alternative to democracy that CEECs citizens perceived through an EU lens. A lack of mechanisms to prevent backsliding and to see through the “democratic facade” created by populist leaders, as well as a slow reaction to the crisis by the EU, had allowed nationalist and populist parties to flourish.

Predictions of Hypothesis 2

The set of predictions carried out by hypothesis 2 would include an anti-democratic stance of Eurosceptic parties that they would use to mobilize support. In addition, the populist parties would refer to the democratic deficit of the EU, as well as grievances from accession, in their statements. It would be evident that populist parties in power put up a “democratic facade” while simultaneously taking actions towards democratic backsliding, which would not be opposed by the voters. The populist leaders would use the examples of the EU arrogance during bargaining, as well as the lack of power of CEECs as compared to the EU-15, in order to promote Euroscepticism and gain support.

¹¹³ Judy Dempsey. “The EU's Flawed Eastern Enlargement.” *Carnegie Europe*, Carnegie Endowment , 27 Feb. 2018.

Testing of Hypothesis as Application to Case Studies

Poland

Transition in Poland has created economic “losers” who support anti-establishment parties, which acted as opposition to the prevailing attitude of embracing the EU and integration. In Poland, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) electorate is centered around a patriotic and religious message, and stands in opposition to the Civic Platform’s pro-EU and cosmopolitan stance. A parallel could be drawn between the supporters of Law and Justice and UKIP or National Front supporters.¹¹⁴ Jarosław Kaczyński, the current leader of the party, has been achieving the support of “the people” through an emphasis on the issues of immigration and social transfers. PiS had followed on its promises to voters and can take credit for the largest social transfer in Polish contemporary history. Initiatives included: payments to parents for each child after the first one and for poor families for all children, reduction of the retirement age, introduction of free medical care for people over 75, tax-relief for low income individuals, and an increased minimum wage.¹¹⁵ However, it cannot be contended that the support of populist parties for economic reasons comes from the “losers” of transition. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Poland has been one of the highest performing countries in Europe in regards to economic growth with the highest GDP per capita growth among all post-communist states. Since accession, wages have doubled, unemployment decreased by 12 points while poverty decreased by 5. Citizens also report a perception of an improvement in personal living conditions. It could be proposed that the PiS slogan of “Poland in ruins” has the element of constructing a negative

¹¹⁴ Zamoyski, Adam. “The Problem With Poland's New Nationalism.” *Foreign Policy*, Foreign Policy, 28 June 2016.

¹¹⁵ Sierakowski, Slawomir. “Lessons from Poland on Populism.” *World Economic Forum*, WEF and Project Syndicate, 3 Jan. 2017.

reality of the economic situation in the era of post-truth.¹¹⁶ Grzegorz Ekiert asserts that there were no “losers” of globalization in Poland, because citizens have benefited economically from accession across the board.¹¹⁷ Sierakowski cites research to support that “political attitudes in Poland do not align with whether one benefited or lost out during the country’s post-communist economic transformation. The ruling party’s electorate includes many who are generally satisfied with their lives...”¹¹⁸ Therefore, the economic part of the hypothesis could be questioned.

Reasons for the support of economic policy of populist parties lie in the unevenness of the economic growth, nostalgia for the social programs of the communist regime, and consequently the support of Eurosceptic parties for social welfare programs such as the abovementioned reforms by PiS, as well as the West and East discrepancy in the EU. According to Owczarek, the “shock therapy” contributed to an acute increase in income inequality, as well as to an increase in unemployment which resulted in a 20% rate in 2003 and 2004. Almost a third of temporary working contracts of the EU belong to citizens of Poland, which could be attributed to lack of opportunities and uncertain labour markets.¹¹⁹ Free movement has also brought more awareness to the East and West discrepancy to Polish citizens. Owczarek continues that the level of earning is three times lower in Poland than the EU average. The millennials in Poland, who had the opportunity to receive education through scholarships, and the effect of programs such as Erasmus, resulted in interactions with their Western European peers. However,

¹¹⁶ Owczarek, Dominik. “The Roots of Populism in Poland: Unsustainable Growth and Cultural Backlash.” *CIDOB*, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, Apr. 2017.

¹¹⁷ Prof. Grzegorz Ekiert As quoted in Pazzanese, Christina. “In Europe, Nationalism Rising.” *Harvard Gazette*, 1 Mar. 2017.

¹¹⁸ Research conducted by Maciej Gdula of the Institute of Advanced Study in Warsaw as cited in Sierakowski, Sławomir. “How Eastern European Populism Is Different.” *Project Syndicate*, 31 Jan. 2018.

¹¹⁹ Owczarek, Dominik. “The Roots of Populism in Poland: Unsustainable Growth and Cultural Backlash.” *CIDOB*, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, Apr. 2017.

when Polish graduates entered the labour market with similar qualifications as their Western peers, their experience of doing unpaid internships stood in strong contrast to the lifestyle and expectations of the latter, resolving the myth of the equal economic opportunity between East and the West in an integrated Europe.¹²⁰ Economic inequality is especially prevalent between rural and urban areas in Poland,¹²¹ and the populist leaders capitalized on the urban and rural divide.¹²² Therefore, it is the perception of one's economic status, not the actual level of growth, amplified by the reduction of the previously strong social support of the communist regime, as well as the inequality between citizens that drives support for populist politicians in Poland.

In addition to the economic inequality between “the elite” and “the people” that drives the populist agenda, a strong cultural misunderstanding even further contributes to the alienation in Poland. Seeing the West as a cultural threat, and drawing support from the Catholic Church, Polish nationalist politicians mobilize culturally marginalized groups by promoting a message that traditional curriculum and values are threatened by the EU.¹²³ The divide between pro-EU political elites and the mobilized “people” is indeed a moral-cultural rather than a socio-economic one.¹²⁴ Moreover, the Law and Justice party has effectively mobilized the lack of genuine democratic consolidation by framing itself as the opposition to the establishment and “corrupt elite”. PiS argues that the previous ruling Civic Platform party has been led by a post-communist

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Toynbee, Polly. “Poland's Steady Economic Progress Matched by Growth in Social Inequality.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 6 Apr. 2011.

¹²² Feffer, John. “Welcome to Eastern Europe, the Birthplace of Trumpism.” *Foreign Policy In Focus*, 12 Dec. 2017.

¹²³ Prof. Grzegorz Ekiert As quoted in Pazzanese, Christina. “In Europe, Nationalism Rising.” *Harvard Gazette*, 1 Mar. 2017.

¹²⁴ Owczarek, Dominik. “The Roots of Populism in Poland: Unsustainable Growth and Cultural Backlash.” *CIDOB*, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, Apr. 2017.

elite, which had occupied and became entrenched in Polish institutions.¹²⁵ The long incumbency of Civic Platform, whose policy was even coined as “politics of warm water”,¹²⁶ was opposed by the PiS with a strong reform agenda, especially in the area of “draining the swamp”: Kaczynski called for eliminating the elite cartel comprised of anti-Polish “liberal-communist-criminal mafia” and PiS even passed a lustration law in 2006.¹²⁷ The efforts to democratize, including following the rule of law, protecting minority rights, and civic tolerance, in order to join the EU, were followed by “the elite” to reap the economic and security benefits of membership, however, after the accession the incentive to continue was diminished. The approach to democracy-building focused on the belief that the EU-established institutions would “lock in” democratic patterns “was essentially a giant bet on the power of institutions”.¹²⁸ Therefore, the populist and nationalist agenda found support in the moral-cultural alienation, posing as an anti-establishment and action-oriented alternative to the pro-EU “elite” and citizen divide in the environment of weak democratic consolidation.

Hungary

The rise of Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz and abandoned support for the pro-EU MSzP could also be examined through the economic lens. The GDP per capita growth since transition, though

¹²⁵ Szczerbiak, Aleks. “How Will the EU's 'Rule of Law' Investigation Affect Polish Politics?” *The Polish Politics Blog*, 29 Jan. 2016.

¹²⁶ A policy of providing basic goods and stability while refraining from new policy initiatives (page 2: Grzymala-Busse, Anna. “Populism and the Erosion of Democracy in Poland and in Hungary.” *THE FREEMAN SPOGLI INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES Stanford University*, 24 Oct. 2017, pp. 1–7.)

¹²⁷ Page 3: Grzymala-Busse, Anna. “Populism and the Erosion of Democracy in Poland and in Hungary.” *THE FREEMAN SPOGLI INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES Stanford University*, 24 Oct. 2017, pp. 1–7.

¹²⁸ Hanley, Seán, and James Dawson. “Poland Was Never as Democratic as It Looked.” *Foreign Policy*, Foreign Policy, 3 Jan. 2017.

lower than in Poland, had increased 3.7 times.¹²⁹ However, Hungary presents a different case where populism was able to more effectively utilize the economic situation to gain support, and lower growth occurred as contended by many due to a less strict adherence to “shock therapy”. Because of “goulash communism” and strong social welfare programs of Kádár-era, the nostalgia for these programs became especially prevalent during the tumultuous economic transition. Hungary had high external indebtedness, and the downsizing had increased unemployment, increasing the rate of unemployment 11 to 13 percent in the early 1990s. Already existing income inequality trends were not caused, but rather gained momentum in the period of post-transition. It is contended that only 20% of Hungarian citizens could be called the “winners” of transition, mostly those with market-convertible skills.¹³⁰ From 2003-2004, the Hungarian government led by MSzP promoted a policy focused on investing in wages, which led to inflation and debt, as well as economic stagnation.¹³¹ Recently Orbán’s policy provided a stronger economic support net which consequently gained popular support and did not cause economic downturn as predicted by its opponents. It is noted that “ ‘Hungarians felt they couldn’t spend anything for the last six or seven years,’ according to investor Gergely Szugyi, ‘But now they know what their mortgage will cost and their bills are a little lower, so they’ve started to spend a bit more’.”¹³² It should also be emphasized that Orbán was able to make repayments ahead of time for Hungarian mounting debt from the IMF, although controversy

¹²⁹ From 1990 to 2015, see Cipiur, Jan. “Central European Financial Observer.” *Financial Observer*, 15 May 2017.

¹³⁰ Pages 87-89: Tökés, Rudolf. “Political Transition and Social Transformation in Hungary.” *Afers Internacionals*, Núm. 34-35, Pp. 79-101, CIDOB, 1996.

¹³¹ Page 89: Endre, Spaller. “The Political and Economic Transition in Hungary.”, ed. Rebecca Blocksom, Szabolcs Nagypál, Peter Sajda, *Medi(t)ations and (Re)conciliation: Conflict Resolution and European Integration*. (Bratislava: Bgoi& WSCF-CESR, 2004), pp. 85–90. Keresztény Ökumenikus Diákegyesület (KÖD).

¹³² Gergely Szugyi as quoted in Byrne, Andrew. “ ‘Orbanomics’ Confounds Critics as Hungary’s Economy Recovers.” *Financial Times*, Financial Times, 9 June 2015.

exists whether his economic policy will turn out fruitful in the long run.¹³³ Measures that received the support of the electorate by Hungarian populist leaders included cutting utility prices and forcing loss-making banks to repay 3 billion euros to mortgage payers. Other social welfare-oriented economic measures included a policy of keeping stable gas prices and compensations of crop farmers incurring economic losses.¹³⁴ It can be confidently asserted that the Fidesz-led initiatives appeal to the nostalgic feelings for the communist-era social economic support in face of the uncertainty created by market transition and fears of not having employment or skills necessary for the new economic order.

Although Hungary's transition has exemplary democratic origins with the famous Open Roundtable Talks, currently the situation in regards to democracy in Hungary is perceived as the most in danger among CEECs with profound changes to freedom of the judiciary and a rise in extremist attacks on religious and ethnic minorities.¹³⁵ The social support for populist parties is the highest in Hungary among CEECs.¹³⁶ One reason the backsliding in democratization occurred in Hungary could be that in contrast to other case studies, the ruling pro-EU coalition was defeated by the populist parties not only due economic or ideological reasons, but also due to a scandal in the highly sensitive area of corruption. The leader of the pro-EU Democratic Coalition Ferenc Gyurcsány resigned in 2006 due to the party's failure to recover the Hungarian

¹³³ Byrne, Andrew. " 'Orbanomics' Confounds Critics as Hungary's Economy Recovers." *Financial Times*, Financial Times, 9 June 2015.

¹³⁴ Ilie, Cornelia. "Populism in Post-Communist Romania and Hungary: Representing Cultural and Political Otherness ." *РЕТОРИКА И КОМУНИКАЦИИ*, Rhetoric and Communications E-Journal, Issue 23, July 2016, 21 Aug. 2016.

¹³⁵ Page 2: United States Congress. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. (2015). *The trajectory of democracy--why Hungary matters: Hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, One Hundred Thirteenth Congress, first session, March 19, 2013*. Washington: U.S. Government Publishing Office.

¹³⁶ Page 24: Ernst Stetter, Tamás Boros. "Central and Eastern Europe." *The State of Populism in the European Union 2016*, FEPS – Founda on for European Progressive Studies and Policy Solutions, 2016.

economy from crisis and because of being caught lying to citizens about the true state of economy during a broadcast speech at a party meeting, which caused public outrage¹³⁷ and a sharp increase in political polarization in the country.¹³⁸ Due to an inherited mistrust towards political elites from the Soviet times, such scandal could have shaped the public opinion of pro-EU groups and the EU in general. Fidesz was able to capture the role of the anti-establishment party,¹³⁹ especially in light of the scandal involving a party that had overseen the accession process. By 2014 elections Fidesz was actively engaged in criticizing “the Brussels elite and bureaucracy, the technocrats and later Jean-Claude Juncker in person”, and participated in serious sovereignty debates with the European Commission.¹⁴⁰ However, it is difficult to find a direct correlation between the behaviour of actors during the accession process and a negative perception of democracy.

The grievances used to mobilize against the EU relate closely to the history of the Socialist coalition acquiring debt and the response to EU immigration policy. A €20 billion credit had to be taken out from the troika of the IMF-World Bank-EU¹⁴¹ to support the Hungarian economy. According to Richter, after this 2008 rescue package, the populist government changed the strategy from austerity measures and severe cuts to “economic growth first and then a balanced budget”, declaring “a war on public debt”. However, disagreement exist whether Hungary would be able to sustain growth without unpopular austerity measures to the

¹³⁷ Freeman, Colin. “Hungary's Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany Resigns.” *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 21 Mar. 2009.

¹³⁸ FERENC LACZÓ. “Populism in Power in Hungary.” *Eurozine*, Razpotja (Spring 2018) (in Slovene) / Eurozine (in English), 29 Mar. 2018.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Botond Feledy. “Hungary: Populism or Politics?” *CIDOB Publication “Populism in Europe: from Symptom to Alternative?”*, Fundación CIDOB., Apr. 2017.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

pension systems and other welfare programs, which Fidesz during election claimed as unnecessary.¹⁴² As alluded to previously, the populist economic strategy drew support from the standpoint of giving the freedom to citizens from austerity measures that were reducing the already shrunk from economic transition social support net. In addition, it allowed the populists to demonstrate that they did not waver under the EU, IMF and World Bank pressure by conducting a different policy that was not consistent with the one dictated by the international organizations, which was able to both stabilize the economy and protect the interests of its citizens foremost, although questions about the effectiveness of the populist measures in the long run remain. Hungarian economic situation contributed to the increased support of the populist criticism of the “Brussels elite”. As in regards to the question of immigration, the Hungarian government is one of the most immigration-opposing states of the EU.¹⁴³ Immigrants would use Hungary as a transit state to move further West.¹⁴⁴ The immigrant appeal approval at first instance of Hungary is the lowest among all members of the EU.¹⁴⁵ Two reasons are proposed to explain the Orbán government’s appeal to the anti-immigrant sentiment: according to the hypothesis proposed by Stein, “Orbán securitizes the refugee crisis as an existential threat to Hungary and by constructing a social identity model, he maximizes the impact the politicization

¹⁴² Richter, Sándor. “The Chokehold of Populism - Hungary's Economy.” Edited by Petra and Evan Mellande, *Heinrich Böll Foundation*, The German Version of the Article Was Published in: Manfred Sapper and Volker Weichsel (Eds.): *Quo Vadis, Hungaria? Kritik Der Ungarischen Vernunft* (OSTEUROPA, 12/2011), 22 May 2012.

¹⁴³ Podobnik, Boris, Marko Jusup, Dejan Kovac, and H. E. Stanley. “Predicting the Rise of EU Right-Wing Populism in Response to Unbalanced Immigration.” *Complexity*, vol. 2017, 2017, pp. 1–12., Hindawi. 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Page 10: Zsolt Marton. “Populism and the Refugee Crisis The Communication of the Hungarian Government on the European Refugee Crisis in 2015-2016 .” *Malmo University Faculty of Culture and Society*, Media and Communications Masters Thesis, 2017.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 15

of the situation which then results in more support of his party”.¹⁴⁶ The other reasons stems from the populist government utilizing the lack of a easily accessible and pragmatic plan to the immigration issue from the EU as a contrast to the direct and active approach of Fidesz as a way to demonstrate their legitimacy over the ineffective “elite”: Orban blamed the EU for a failure to handle the crisis,¹⁴⁷ came up with six suggestions to end the issue for the EU summit,¹⁴⁸ and the public approval of Fidesz rose as a result.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, the parties indeed use the lack of coherence of EU policy, especially in regards to immigration and economics, and the EU democratic deficit as a way to demonstrate more credibility and political legitimacy in governing “the people” over “the elite”.

Czech Republic

The effects of transition in the realm of economics have manifested themselves in the resurgence of nationalism and populism in the political arena of the country, but not necessarily as a result of the mobilization of transition “losers”. The Czech Republic has an advantageous economic position due to its industrial development¹⁵⁰ and the transition process has been claimed as a “miracle” in part due to the ability of the Czech economy to retain low unemployment rates even below other CEECs.¹⁵¹ The Czech Republic is also highlighted as the country with the lowest income inequality in the EU.¹⁵² A closer link between the economic

¹⁴⁶ Stein as cited in page 26 Zsolt Marton. “Populism and the Refugee Crisis The Communication of the Hungarian Government on the European Refugee Crisis in 2015-2016 .” *Malmo University Faculty of Culture and Society* , Media and Communications Masters Thesis, 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Index.hu as cited in Ibid, 11.

¹⁴⁸ Joób as cited in Ibid, 11.

¹⁴⁹ Közvéleménykutatók.hu as cited in Ibid, 11.

¹⁵⁰ “The Facts About The Czech Republic And Its Strengthening Economy | GDP.” *Emerging Europe*, 2018.

¹⁵¹ Page 36: Robert J. Gitter and Markus Scheuer. “Low Unemployment in the Czech Republic: Miracle or Mirage?” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, Monthly Labor Review August 1998 Pages 31-37, Aug. 1998.

¹⁵² Patricolo, Claudia. “New Report Claims Czech Republic Has Lowest Inequality in EU.” *Emerging Europe*, 5 Feb. 2018.

situation and rise of populism had resulted from a 2006 incident and also appeals more to the notion of the social benefits net and relations between the political elite and citizens. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) has lost popular support in the country due to its emphasis on reducing the state debt through austerity measures,¹⁵³ but the protests have been especially fueled by misrepresentation of the economic situation, which did not require such strict measures, as well as the determination to pursue such measures without the regard for potential social costs.¹⁵⁴ This demonstrates that the social net reduction as the result of transition had influenced the loss of support for neoliberal economic measures, as well as exacerbated the mistrust of elites from the Soviet time that was characterized by the non-acceptance of the elite's legitimacy. Andrej Babiš ran an anti-establishment campaign, opposing the traditional parties and portraying himself as a business persona outside of the world of politics that would be able to add efficiency to the system.¹⁵⁵ The pro-EU, liberal parties were supported in elections up until 2013, however, public support shifted to Eurosceptic parties like Babiš's ANO, many of which were established post-2010.¹⁵⁶ There could be changes in the Czech case due to recent allegations of Babiš of fraud that have not yet been proven, which has the potential to negatively impact the support of the politician whose campaign focused on the "clean up" of the Czech political arena.¹⁵⁷ As for now, the socially oriented economic measures of populist parties find strong support in the Czech Republic as they did in Hungary.

¹⁵³ Draxler as cited in page 5: ONDŘEJ ČÍSAŘ. *Czech Republic: From Post-Communist Idealism to Economic Populism*. International Policy Analysis.

¹⁵⁴ Čísař and Navrátil as cited in page 5: ONDŘEJ ČÍSAŘ. *Czech Republic: From Post-Communist Idealism to Economic Populism*. International Policy Analysis.

¹⁵⁵ Shotter, James. "Andrej Babiš Victory in Czech Republic Raises Populism Fears." *Financial Times*, FT, 22 Oct. 2017.

¹⁵⁶ Drew Hinshaw and Philip Heijmans. "Upstart Pirate Party Remixes Czech Politics." *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 10 Nov. 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Muller, Robert. "Czech PM Babiš Battles Fraud Charges as Cabinet Loses Confidence Vote." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 16 Jan. 2018.

The accession process was referred to in Czech politics in statements meant to mobilize political support. ODS, though not a populist party, has used the reference to pre-accession negotiations in a populist manner when criticizing the Social Democratic Party for betraying Czech people by settling for unfavorable conditions and highlighted the negative aspects of the Treaty of Accession.¹⁵⁸ ODS later attempted to increase its popularity based on supporting the national interest and also on the Eurosceptic sentiment by standing against the adoption of the Treaty Establishing the Constitution for Europe.¹⁵⁹ However, rather than appealing to specific grievances such as negotiations over accession bargaining, the criticism of the EU by the populist parties and politicians in the status quo focuses more on immigration and the power of “the Brussels elite”. For example, the populist statements of the current Czech President Miloš Zeman revolve around protecting “...Czech independence from overbearing Eurocrats in Brussels, from the bogeyman of Islamization, and from internal forces who sought to drive the Czech people apart”.¹⁶⁰ He had asserted that the Czech society is divided among those who “he represents and the ‘café society’ of Prague”, and demeaned journalists as a part of “the elite” that needs to be restrained.¹⁶¹ Tomio Okamura has also gained popularity in light of anti-Islamization statements and those such as “zero tolerance of migration”.¹⁶² The low unemployment rate removes a possibility of resisting immigrants based on the fear of lost workplaces, rather, the anti-immigrant sentiment is strong in Czech Republic due to a power imbalance between the

¹⁵⁸ Adriana Klímková and Petr Sprinz. “Populism and Nationalism in the V4: Temporary Setback.” *Global Politics*, Global Politics Časopis pro Politiku a Mezinárodní Vztahy, 2012.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Gardner-Gill, Ben. “The Czech Republic's Populist President.” *Stanford Politics*, Stanford Politics, 20 Feb. 2018.

¹⁶¹ Miloš Zeman as cited in Gardner-Gill, Ben. “The Czech Republic's Populist President.” *Stanford Politics*, Stanford Politics, 20 Feb. 2018.

¹⁶² Okamura as cited in Gardner-Gill, Ben. “The Czech Republic's Populist President.” *Stanford Politics*, Stanford Politics, 20 Feb. 2018.

country and Germany, which highlights the East-West divide as one of the EU-related induced causes of the resurgence of populism. According to Tucker, Czech Republic is economically heavily dependent on Germany, and the refugee quota question is seen as a policy forced by Germany on the Czech people, highlighting the negative perception of dependency and the power imbalance. However, even with such statements and sentiments, populism in Czech republic could be classified as a not far-right extreme ideological one. Nonetheless, concerns in regards to democracy, freedom of press and xenophobia in Czech Republic remain.¹⁶³

Analysis of Case Study Results

The three presented cases demonstrate common patterns regarding the resurgence of populism and nationalism while simultaneously portraying the differences in populism's manifestations and causes. Among the three, one major difference is that the Czech and Hungarian leaders make provocative pro-Russia statements and actions and such were not present in Poland. All of the cases are similar in the fact that they had a ruling pro-EU party or coalition and leaders, that usually either gained credibility and power during transition or had their roots originally from those who led the anti-communist resistance. The populist politicians and parties are similar with their anti-immigrant and anti-elite rhetoric, with an emphasis on providing social economic support for “the people”. However, though the shift in support of populist politicians happened in all of the three cases, the circumstances and causes for the shift vary. Though there are overarching causes to the shift, external circumstances can be as powerful in their explanatory power or complement the larger hypotheses. For example, although distrust of elites is a common theme in the cases, and is connected to the explanation of the influence of

¹⁶³ Tucker, Aviezer. “Fifty Shades of Czech Populism.” *The American Interest*, 23 Oct. 2017.

the Soviet past on the perception of the political elite as corrupt, the scandal involving a high-ranking politician in Hungary caused severe polarization of politics and damaged the political prospects of pro-EU parties, while the fraud allegations of the PM of Czech Republic might tilt the political scene in an opposite manner. The ideological explanation for the support of populism which is drawn on a cultural divide seems a stronger one for the case of Poland, while economic development and austerity measures take more preference in explaining the popularity of Orban in Hungary. All of the three presented CEECs also have differences in the way that they interact with the EU: Poland having a fast-growing economy and labor contracts, the Czech economy being very dependent on the German one, and the persistent economic grievances of Hungarian people from the imposed austerity measures induced by the EU debt. Nonetheless, the Hungarian government stands out as the one whose populism has so far been the most confrontational in regards to the response it had caused from the EU.

The first hypothesis argued that the resurgence of populism and nationalism was a consequence of the transition, specifically the conflict of the new institutions with the Soviet ones, the decrease in the social benefits, as well as the disappointment of the economic “losers” from the shift to a market economy, as well as the ideological makeup of post-communist politics that allowed populist parties to pose themselves as anti-establishment parties in a system of pro-EU party dominance. The presented case studies in this research suggests that the economy-based explanation does have explanatory power, but not a strong one due to how economically beneficial the transition has been for CEECs and the level of overall economic prosperity of the three case studies. Firstly, the predictions of the hypothesis about “losers” being a politically active group did not manifest itself at all in the case of Poland and was not strongly

supported in the other two cases. Rather, the conflict with the reduction of social benefits, as illustrated and strongly supported in the paper, as compared to the Soviet time, drives support for socially oriented populist economics measures. Though this paper does use data on the increase in inequality and decline in social mobility as supporting arguments for the resurgence of populism, which also could be seen as the effects of the market economy, it should be noted that there is a potential danger to drawing between them and populist support a correlation. Populism focuses heavily on the perception of the economic situation rather than real economic situation,¹⁶⁴ and the control of the media outlets and trust from the voters only prompts citizens to believe that the economic situation is worse than it actually is. On the other hand, it seems that the populist support could be derived not from mere negative criticism, but also from successful economic policy, even if it is ambivalent whether those measures will succeed in the long run. Populists gain credibility and support when their economic trajectory settles debt and promotes growth while simultaneously is more empathetic to the needs of the “people” with its generous social policies, and strikes deep contrast with the austerity measures of the EU-oriented economic policy of the pro-EU parties. Also, it should be noted that the historic memory of corruption as a vice of the communist system explains why the populist parties’ anti-corruption appeal gains wide popularity in CEECs in comparison to other Western states, and facilitates the antagonization of “the elite”.

The political part of the first hypotheses was supported by the four case studies. Populist and nationalist parties did capture an anti-establishment position that contrasted with the pro-EU political leadership, specifically serving as opposition to the liberal market ideology. The case

¹⁶⁴ Torben M. Andersen & Giuseppe Bertola & John Driffill & Clemens Fuest & Harold James & Jan-Egbert Sturm & Branko. “Chapter 2: Economic Policy and the Rise of Populism - It's Not So Simple.” *EEAG Report on the European Economy Pp 50-66*, CESifo Group Munich, 2017.

studies revealed deeper causes for why the parties captured the spot of pro-EU parties' competitors. Explanations such as the creation of a "democratic facade" instead of genuine democratic participation, as well as lack of policy and lukewarmness of pro-EU parties are presented in the case studies as viable causes to why the populist parties gained the opposition spot. Cas Mudde also adds that political de-alignment and protests are structural reasons due to which populist were able to gain popularity in changes of political preferences,¹⁶⁵ which Inglehart argues had occurred post-industrial revolution.¹⁶⁶ Also, an ideological shift occurred due to the EU accession, because the parties that started having a strong stance on open markets and society shifted from the ideology that they had before, such as Christian democratic and Conservative. Such changes led the parties to become non-ideological and policy focused, while the populists provided that ideological alternative for voters.¹⁶⁷ Although the case of CEECs could be highlighted as unique due to transition creating a certain political preference for pro-EU parties and an opportunity for populist parties to capture the spot of opposition as a result of de-alignment and shift in ideological preference, the way that the populist parties mobilize on the basis of anti-establishment politics in CEECs is very similar to the way that they do in the cases of Western populism. The appeal of the anti-establishment stance, therefore, is a strong explanation for the resurgence of populism across national borders.

¹⁶⁵ Cas Mudde interviewed by Weingartner, Benedikt. "The European Union Is a Victim of Its Own Success." Cas Mudde on Structural Reasons behind the Rise of Populism in Europe, #DialogueonEurope, 5 Dec. 2017

¹⁶⁶ Inglehart as cited by Cas Mudde in Weingartner, Benedikt interview of Cas Mudde. "The European Union Is a Victim of Its Own Success." *Cas Mudde on Structural Reasons behind the Rise of Populism in Europe*, #DialogueonEurope, 5 Dec. 2017.

¹⁶⁷ Cas Mudde interviewed by Weingartner, Benedikt. "The European Union Is a Victim of Its Own Success." Cas Mudde on Structural Reasons behind the Rise of Populism in Europe, #DialogueonEurope, 5 Dec. 2017.

The second hypothesis argued that the resurgence of nationalism and populism should be examined in the Visegrad countries through the lens of their relative EU accession and membership in the supranational union. Specifically the argument was centered around the conflict between Europeanization, especially bureaucratization, and the new liberal democratic structures and institutions of CEECs, as well as democratic deficit in the EU. In addition, the power imbalance promoted by the accession process by the EU, as well as the East and West inequality, had contributed to a negative perception of democracy, which is evident in the drop in trust in democracy from transition to accession recorded by the Eurobarometer survey. Lastly, the hypothesis asserted that the EU did not have a mechanism to prevent democratic backsliding and employed measures against populist limit to freedoms (“Juncker paradox”) once the country had lost the incentive to democratize after the conditionality was lifted. The case studies did not demonstrate a significant causal effects of the changes in institutional structures and democratic deficit on the resurgence of populism, as predicted by hypothesis 2. The case of the power imbalance was more supported by evidence, especially in regards of imposed austerity measures and economic policy. The East and West divide might drive the perception of economic downturn that populists seek in order to promote their message, as was mentioned in the case of Poland where the freedom of movement only highlighted the severe differences between economic opportunities. The arrogance of the EU during accession was only mentioned when it was convenient for political parties to gain public support, but did not seem to have a prominent position in Eurosceptic rhetoric of the status quo as outlined in the predictions. This could be explained by the fact that the CEECs have benefitted from accession in terms of economic growth and security, and thus the positive associations with accession and the benefits that the

countries reaped would outweigh negative criticism directed at the question of EU membership in general. In addition, the CEECs populists do not have a goal of leaving the EU, but rather aim to maintain a Eurosceptic position, and therefore they focus on more current issues popular with Eurosceptics such as immigration and austerity measures in order to bargain for more sovereignty while preserving the benefits of membership.

Lack of incentive to democratize and lack of measures to prevent democratic backsliding by the EU are not the causes of a negative perception of democracy, as predicted, but rather effects of a larger populist battle against “the elites”. Firstly, a negative attitude towards democracy, or at least a willingness to support populist politicians in light of their anti-democratic policies, is more explained by the dominance of the pro-EU political elite in Visegrad countries post-transition, which promoted democracy. The negative perception of the pro-EU parties reinforced by populists could have driven the lack of trust in democracy and its negative perception. The ability of populist to claim that they represent “the people” while the liberal, democratic, pro-EU elites do not, as well as the antagonization of “the elite”, explains the support for populist politicians even outside of the CEECs. For populist politicians, it was easy to base their ideology as the one supporting “the people” first and the national interest, while the Brussels elite was another “elite” which they could blame for shortcomings after they had to shift their focus from internal forces when they came to power. In this case, the power imbalances could have contributed to create antagonism between the EU “elite” and “the people”, which was further exacerbated by the already present distrust of elites inherited from the Soviet times. However, it would be unfair to state that the EU became a victim of the populist “elite seeking”. The lack of one-to-one participation of EU citizens of CEECs in the EU decision-making

process, as well as the assertion of policy that was not tailored to the country's unique circumstances, gave advantage for the populist who employed actions more supportive of the local context. Therefore, the democratic deficit prediction of the hypothesis was supported by the analysis. For example, the way that populist leadership was able to pay off debts and promote growth by avoiding economic austerity measures has only supported the constructed notion of the EU as a distant and unempathetic “elite” that should not be a reference for representing “the people”. The issue of immigration is also easily exploited in the larger populist framework of demonstrating “the elite” incompetence in governing “the people”. For the populists shutting down borders is a viable action step that prevents any immigration-induced problems in their countries, because they do not want to take responsibility for this larger European Union crisis and can shift the blame to the EU for being incompetent in addressing it. The rise of post-truth¹⁶⁸ and simplification of issues to mobilize support both explain the resurgence of populism, as long as those issues allow populists to demonstrate that they are protecting “the people” from the elites, Brussels, Islamization, journalists, social welfare cuts... Therefore, populist parties and politicians do not have to refer to specific incidents during accession, grievances against EU power abuse, or more complex structural problems of the EU in order to draw support.

Is Central and Eastern European populism unique?

This paper aimed to argue that the resurgence of nationalism and populism in the status quo Central and Eastern Europe could be traced to democratic transition and the 2004 EU accession, the two factors present in the cases of Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic. The question arises: did the resurgence of populism and nationalism in Europe occur in other cases

¹⁶⁸ Post-truth is defined by the Oxford Dictionaries as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”: Post-truth. “Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries, 2018.

that are either in the EU or those that have undergone the transition, as it did in the cases of Visegrad 4 which are all examined in this paper except the case of Slovakia? Populism is gaining popularity in Bulgaria, with parties gaining around 10% of the vote, while not being as popular in Romania, although both of these EU states have undergone a post-Soviet transition.¹⁶⁹ States such as Ukraine and Moldova, that have been a part of the Soviet Union but have not yet been accessed to the EU, have experienced an anti-elite and anti-oligarchic political resurgence, specifically an anti-EU sentiment present in Moldova with the disillusionment in the pro-EU government that was dissolved due to rivalries between coalition parties. The cases of Moldova and Ukraine are unique due to the fragile state of democracy and transition as compared to CEECs.¹⁷⁰ Among EU states that have not undergone a democratic transition, but that have experienced a rise in populism, Scandinavian states experienced populist parties gaining up to 20% of the latest vote share, as well as with their popularity growing fast in France, Germany, and Netherlands. Populist parties currently do not experience such level of popular support in Spain, Greece, and Italy.¹⁷¹ The post-Soviet Baltic states have also experienced a rise in populist social movements, among which are Labour Party in Lithuania and nationalist movements in Latvia.¹⁷² This analysis supports that the success of populism as a political ideology of parties is not only a CEECs phenomenon, however, the region does have higher than average support than others and has distinctive features. The rise of populism in post-Soviet non-EU member states

¹⁶⁹ Tartar, Andre. "How the Populist Right Is Redrawing the Map of Europe." *Bloomberg.com*, Bloomberg, 11 Dec. 2017

¹⁷⁰ TOMČÍKOVÁ, NELLY. "Populist Backlash In V4 Countries: Lessons To Be Learned For Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia." *Charter'97 :: News from Belarus - Belarusian News - Republic of Belarus - Minsk*, Charter'97, 30 May 2016.

¹⁷¹ Tartar, Andre. "How the Populist Right Is Redrawing the Map of Europe." *Bloomberg.com*, Bloomberg, 11 Dec. 2017

¹⁷² Mari-Liis Jakobson, Ilze Balcere, Oudekki Loone, Anu Nurk, Tõnis Saarts, Rasa Zakeviciute. "Populism in the Baltic States: A Research Report." *OEF*, Open Estonia Foundation and Tallinn University Institute of Political Science and Governance and Partners. , Nov. 2012,

demonstrates that populism may gain popularity even in a very weak state of democratic consolidation and can flourish even without the absence of the EU as “the elite” on the political landscape. The strong presence of populism across Europe indicates that populism as an ideology is not unique to states with a Soviet past and a democratic transition, and the existing presence of populism in states that have either of the two conditions supports that the two contribute to the popularity of the political ideology. However, a heavy presence in CEECs with swiping electoral victories reinforces the notion that the Visegrad 4 have a unique condition that supports the flourishing of populism.

The anti-immigration and anti-elite rhetoric is present in both cases of Western European and Eastern European populism, with politicians like Marine Le Pen and Sebastian Kurz receiving special attention as examples of populist leaders in the West. As mentioned previously, anti-immigration and anti-elite rhetoric unites the parties across Europe. Some claim, however, that due to the history of treating the minorities such as Roma as the “other”, Eastern populism contains a more openly xenophobic and exclusionary rhetoric. In addition, the opposition to the main liberal pro-EU parties as “the other”, which was present in the cases analyzed in this paper, is uncommon in Western Europe where Eurosceptic parties do not question the political legitimacy of their opponents. Western populism springs from a crisis in democracy as in the end of adversarial politics in Western countries and a lack of challenging of the established consensus of liberal values, whereas Eastern populism is a reaction to “mainstream” politics.¹⁷³ The issue of accusing pro-EU parties of not only not being representative of “the people”, but also not being a legitimate political opponent, stems from the previously mentioned absence of a

¹⁷³ Herman, Lise. “Is Populism in Western Europe and Central Eastern Europe the Same Thing?” *Nouvelle Europe*, 5 Jan. 2018

“right” and a “left” party spectrum in the political system. The discussion falls into the right or wrong spectrum, or “friend” or “foe”, which aids the populist discourse more than in the cases of Western European states.¹⁷⁴ Another important distinction lies in the nature of civil society, which is not only weaker developed in CEECs than in Western Europe, but also is focused in areas such as charity, religion, and leisure rather than political participation.¹⁷⁵ While Western and Eastern populist parties are not the same because “populism is a discourse, and a discourse adapts to its public and nourishes itself of its context”, Mudde argues that “differences between East and West (...) will soon be irrelevant given the homogenising effect of EU membership”, however, some question whether that would be true in the future.¹⁷⁶ Currently populist parties continue to win over traditional parties only in CEECs.¹⁷⁷

Conclusion

After thoroughly examining the resurgence of populism in Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic, this paper attempted to explain why populist and nationalist parties and politicians have been successful in the political arena of CEECs in light of a relatively recent EU accession. The two proposed explanations, based on the effects of transition and the effects of accession, were partially supported by the testing of hypothesis through the analysis of case studies. It was found that though the idea of a transition “losers” electorate is not supported, the appeal to social economic policy of populist parties is indeed caused by the loss of the social welfare net created by transition to market economy through “shock therapy”. Another effect of transition, or

¹⁷⁴ Sierakowski, Sławomir. “How Eastern European Populism Is Different.” Project Syndicate, 31 Jan. 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

¹⁷⁶ Herman, Lise. “Is Populism in Western Europe and Central Eastern Europe the Same Thing?” *Nouvelle Europe*, 5 Jan. 2018

¹⁷⁷ Sierakowski, Sławomir. “How Eastern European Populism Is Different.” Project Syndicate, 31 Jan. 2018.

establishment of a pro-EU political elite, created a context in which populist parties could rally against “the elite” and “the establishment” more easily, especially if pro-EU parties or politicians had lost trust from their electorate due to corruption scandals. The predictions of the second hypothesis in regards to arrogance of the EU in accession bargaining were not supported by the findings at all, however, the idea of a EU democratic deficit was supported by the attempts of populist parties to demonstrate EU incompetence in policy, such as in regards to the immigration issue or economic austerity measures. The important finding of the paper is that populist parties gain support by constructing a reality for their voters in the era of post-truth, and that reality is centered around the same issues and rhetoric of protecting “the people” present in political discourse across European states. Therefore, the ability of populist and nationalist parties to gain the place of opposition in CEECs political arena and their generous social economic policy in light of recent economic transition best explain the causes for such strong support of these parties among the three studied former Soviet EU members. Recommendations include supporting efforts to create strong civil society in CEECs, combating the “democratic facades”, encouraging sensible economic policy, as well as the reducing the democratic deficit of the EU. Important areas of future research include comparative studies of populist parties outside of the European context and the issue of immigration in European politics, for these issue areas are this research paper’s limitations.

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